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Porcelain Tile Finishes

There are a number of different types of finish for porcelain tiles; which you should choose will depend on your budget, how and where you will be using the tiles and also the desired final look.

Unpolished

Unpolished porcelain tiles are produced from clay / raw materials which are mixed into a slurry before being spray dried into a dust then fired at high temperature. Following the firing of the raw materials the tiles are then cooled and packed with no further finishing, the surface being left matt. This finish is often found with full bodied and double or multiple loaded production methods.

Full Body Porcelain - Full body tiles are made from pressing the same coloured dust throughout the whole body of the tile and are therefore usually more expensive to buy than double loaded tiles. This is the traditional way to manufactured unglazed porcelain tiles.

Double Load Porcelain – double load porcelain tiles are a fairly recently technical introduction and have the same material dust throughout and provide the same technical performance but use a neutral colour dust to form the base of the tile and then coloured dust forms the top level. The benefit of this is that using a lower percentage of coloured dust reduces the overall cost of the tiles.

The surface of both full body and double loaded tiles is slip resistant in dry areas and will provide an amount of slip resistance in intermittent wet environments. Special profiles / structures can be added to unpolished porcelain tiles to provide extra slip resistance in wet areas, however they do require more cleaning / maintenance as they have a rougher profile. Unpolished porcelain tiles are also generally rectified.

It is possible to achieve a similar look to these tiles with glazed porcelain tiles, but the glaze is generally unable to provide the resistance to high traffic that an unpolished porcelain tile can. All glazed tiles are subject to the PEI (Porcelain Enamel Institute) wear rating considerations. See our separate guidance sheet on this.

Polished

Polished porcelain tiles are polished using small brushes in the same way as natural stone to remove the rough surface and create a smooth, fine finish. They are then often rectified to remove any bevelling on the edges. The surface is usually easy to clean and has an expensive appearance. It is often stronger and needs less maintenance than natural stone however, it can be more prone to scratching and will be slippery in wet conditions. The polishing process will cause the tile to become more porous in some cases although many polished porcelain tiles are now delivered pre-sealed but it is recommended that polished porcelain tiles are sealed both before and after grouting regardless. It is essential to follow both the manufacturers and your supplier's recommendations prior to fixing.

Lappato (semi-polished)

This finish carried out on glazed porcelain tiles where the surface is given a light buffing to partially but not completely remove the glaze and create a partially shiny, partially matt surface. The finish is not as slippery as a fully polished tile when wet and tends to be more affordable, as less polishing is required. It is currently common practice to use the same colour tile on the wall and floor but to use the Matt finish on the floor and Lappato finish on the walls to give added shine.

Honed

There are 2 different ways of obtaining this finish: either in the press where a specific piece of equipment is required to produce it, or by brushing lightly after the tile has been pressed but before firing. Not only is it stain and scratch resistant and easy to clean but it offers a degree of slip resistance in dry and intermittent wet conditions.

Profiled / Structured

The required profile or structure is pressed into the tile in the wet stage and then fired. The finish is exactly the same as the unpolished one discussed above. The downsides to profiled / structured tiles are that this sort of tile is more difficult to clean as dirt more easily collects in the structure and the surface can be quite rough to walk on, especially for barefoot traffic. It is therefore essential to remove ALL surface grout at the time of fixing. An alternative to profiled or structured tiles where slip resistance is important is by the use of an additive called Carborundum. This grit like material can be added to the face of the tile before firing to give the surface a rougher texture thus providing slip resistance, but still allows the tile to be easy to clean.